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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Biographic Information Division

VON BRENTANO, Heinrich

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Dr. Heinrich von Brentano has been Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany since June 1955, and although there have been persistent rumors that his political importance is declining, it seems likely that he will hold the position as long as Chancellor Adenauer remains on the scene. Since Adenauer is to a very large degree his own foreign minister, von Brentano's opportunities for independent action are limited and he is regarded in some quarters as no more than a high-level aide-de-camp to the Chancellor. Once considered to be more "flexible" than Chancellor Adenauer on matters of foreign policy, von Brentano has over the years become increasingly rigid in his distrust of the Kremlin. He was reported to have disagreed violently with Adenauer over the resumption of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in September 1955. Regarded as a man of considerable diplomatic skill and a keen analyst of political developments, von Brentano is not, however, an effective orator or a forceful leader. His talents lie rather in negotiation, where he can be extremely persuasive, and in cloakroom politics, in which he is said to excel. His demonstrated ability to get along with men of diverse political views has also been criticized as his chief weakness--a desire to placate all sides and to avoid taking strong positions.

Heinrich von Brentano was born at Offenbach on June 20, 1904, of an aristocratic Catholic family, many of whose members have played illustrious roles in Germany's political, intellectual and cultural past. After studying at the Universities of Frankfurt and Munich, von Brentano received the degree of doctor of laws from the University of Giessem in 1930, and spent the twelve years of Nazi rule as an attorney at the Appellate Court in Darmstadt. Although he never suffered personally from Nazi persecution and, in fact, earned a reputation during the Nazi period as an able jurist with expert competence in the field of international law, he was under constant suspicion as a member of a family whose views were outspokenly anti-Nazi. In 1945 von Brentano assisted in the formation of the Hesse Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and drafted the constitution of that state. He also helped draft the Constitution (Basic Law) of the German Federal Republic, adopted in 1949, and in that same year was elected to the Bundestag on the CDU ticket. When Adenauer became Federal Chancellor, von Brentano was elected Bundestag chairman of the CDU faction by an overwhelming majority. He was reelected to the Bundestag in 1953 and in 1957.

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VON BRENTANO, Heinrich (continued)

A "good European", von Brentano has been a vice president of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe and a delegate to the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community. In October 1952 he was elected chairman of the Strasbourg ad hoc committee of the European Political Community which drafted the Statute for the European Community, envisioning a directly elected Parliament of Europe and a Government of Europe.

Von Brentano is a bachelor of fastidious tastes, fond of good literature, antiques and rare wines. Although tense in manner, he is courteous and affable. He speaks English fairly well.

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